

NC Department of Health and Human Services

NC Division of Services for the Deaf and
Hard of Hearing

Hearing Loss Awareness Month

Important Facts and the Pandemic's Impact

May 2021

Hearing Loss Populations in NC

Deaf:

- Generally Deaf from birth or very early age
- Generally, uses American Sign Language (ASL)

Hard of Hearing:

- Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound
- May use hearing aids, cochlear implants or lip-reading

DeafBlind:

- Varying degrees of hearing and visual loss
- May use Tactile Sign Language or ASL

Late-Deafened:

- Hearing loss occurs at any age after the development of speech
- May use ASL, cochlear implants, or any other communication modalities

Hearing Loss Awareness Month (May)

- Traditionally focuses on
 - Populations that identify with
 - Having hearing loss
 - Being hard of hearing
 - Being late-deafened
 - These populations
 - See hearing loss as
 - Important to detect as early as possible
 - Being treatable
 - Important to prevent if possible
 - Values amplification technology
 - Hearing aids
 - Cochlear implants
 - Hearing assistive technology
 - FM and looping technology
- Other awareness months
 - DeafBlind Awareness Month...June
 - Deaf Awareness Month...September



Overview of Hearing Loss

- In North Carolina, over 1.2 million people ages 18 and older have hearing loss.
- Research indicates untreated hearing loss increases the risk of falling and developing dementia.
- Health conditions that increase the chance of hearing loss include diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and kidney disease.
- People over 50 and those with serious health conditions should have regular professional hearing evaluations.
- Take steps to protect your hearing from excessive noise and ototoxic drugs.



Hearing Loss in Medical Settings

- **Know your rights:** Medical providers must provide auxiliary aids and services when needed to communicate effectively.
- **Know what accommodations will work for you:**
 - Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) captioning
 - Assistive listening devices
 - Hearing aid or cochlear implant microphone accessories
- **Request your needed accommodation:** at the time your appointment is scheduled or as soon as you arrive to an emergency center.
- **Provide a written accommodation request**
- **Follow up on your accommodation requests:**
 - Make sure your provider received your request
 - Answer specific questions providers may have
 - Refer them to [DSDHH](#) for additional help if needed
- **Provide feedback to your medical provider** about how they do in meeting your accommodation request.
- **Request a written summary** of your appointment and treatment plan.

Hearing Loss and Military Service

Know the facts:



US Veterans are 30% more likely than the general population to have severe hearing loss.



A 63% increased risk for hearing loss is associated with US Service Members who have combat experience versus those who don't.



More than 2.9 million US Veterans currently receive disability benefits for hearing loss or tinnitus.



Without intervention, hearing loss in adults contributes to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other cognitive disorders.



For additional information & services regarding hearing loss, contact your local [DSDHH Regional Center](#). There are no costs or VA-related requirements.

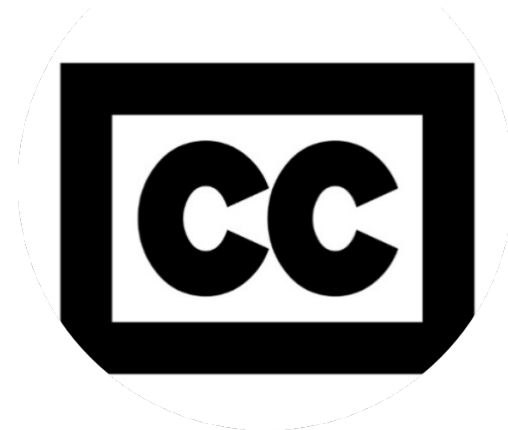
SOURCES:

[AARP: Top Medical Issue for Veterans, 2018](#) / [Hearing Loss Associated With US Military Combat Deployment, 2011](#) / [Hearing Health Foundation: Veteran Statistics, 2021](#)

Hearing Loss and the Pandemic

Guidelines for people with hearing loss

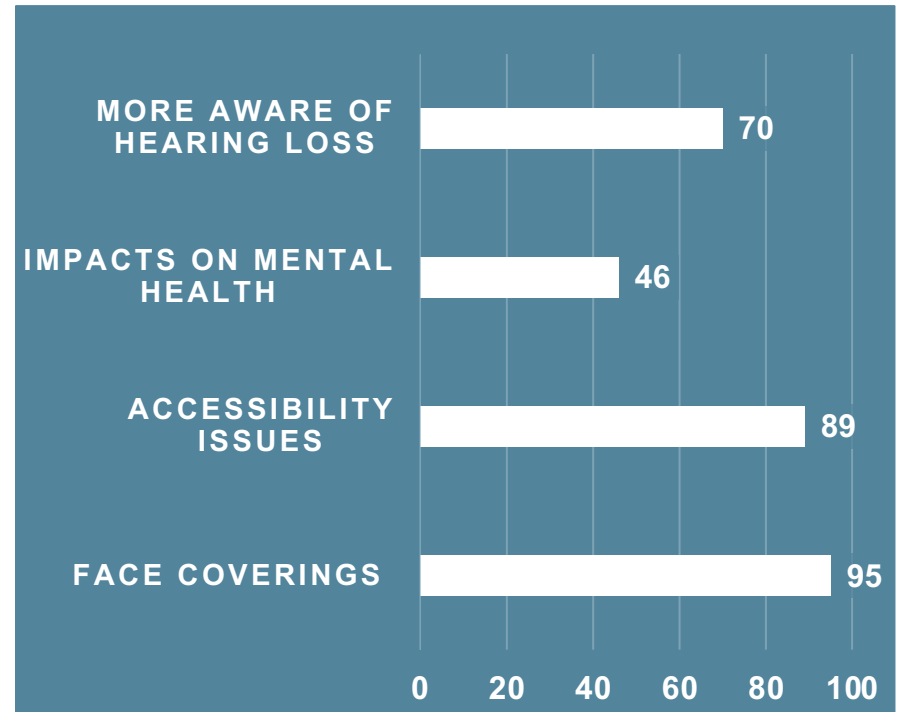
- Consider asking significant others to use a clear mask.
- A special program for hearing aids to reduce a mask's muffling effect can help.
- Telehealth might be a better option than in-person, masked communication.
- For brief, informal conversations, use captioning apps such as Live Transcribe.
- On video calls, ensure:
 - A good connection
 - Adequate lighting
 - Good audio quality



COVID-19's Impacts on Hearing Loss

According to a recent Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) survey:

- 95% of people with hearing loss stated that face coverings impact their ability to hear.
- 89% indicated that they have experienced issues with accessibility during the pandemic.
- 46% have expressed increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and isolation.
- 70% are more aware of their hearing loss due to the pandemic.



SOURCE: COVID-19 & its Impact on the HLAA Community survey. Survey of 1,399 conducted by Survey Monkey, October 10-31, 2020

Hearing Loss and Face Masks

Tips for communicating with people who have hearing loss

- **Order clear masks:** to use when communicating with people who have hearing loss.
- **Be attentive:** If the person with hearing loss cannot understand you, rephrase the sentence rather than repeating.
- **Be patient:** Solid face masks make lip-reading impossible and muffle sound, remember to be patient in communicating with others.
- **Use other forms of communication:** communicate using pen and paper, a [boogie board](#), white board or use your smart phone or tablet typing pad to communicate.
- **Be mindful of distance:** As the distance between two people increases, the sound level quality diminishes and visual cues are more difficult to see.
- **Be visible:** Make sure you directly face the person you are talking to.
- **Be clear and distinct:** speak loudly, but do not shout! Focus on speaking clearly.
- **Ensure that you have been understood:** have the person repeat back what was said.
- **Eliminate Background Noise:** Pick a quiet place without background noise to talk if possible.

SOURCE: Adapted from the “Communication tips when using face masks” infographic distributed by the Ida Institute.

ClearMask™ Distribution

- **Clear masks are recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a safe and accessible option.**
 - Clear masks allow for effective communication to lip-read and see facial expressions.
- **Regional centers will distribute masks to requestors in their region.**
 - Clear masks spread awareness of communication access for consumers and service providers.
 - Each requestor will receive 5 clear masks.
- **Additional information and resources can be found on the NC DSDHH COVID-19 [website](#).**
 - The website directs people to contact their regional centers if assistance is needed with the request form.
 - One-time request for clear mask samples are allowed.



Hearing Loss Resources

- For additional information & services regarding hearing loss, contact your local [DSDHH Regional Center](#)
- DSDHH hearing loss resources related to COVID-19: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/materials-resources/videos-asl-captions>
- DSDHH free clear mask project: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/materials-resources/clear-masks>
- HLAA hearing loss resources related to COVID-19: <https://www.hearingloss.org/coronavirus-covid-19-resources/>

